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Turks Closer to Linking Pope's Assailant With Bulgaria

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WASHINGTON—A Turkish prosecutor's report provides additional evidence linking Mehmet Ali Agca, the man who shot the pope, with a Bulgarian-based ring of Turkish smugglers.

The Turkish report focuses on Mr. Agca's first known major crime, the 1979 murder of a Turkish journalist, Abdi Ipekci, rather than his 1981 attempt to kill Pope John Paul II. But it corroborates important details of an Italian investigation into Mr. Agca's "Bulgarian connection."

The Turkish prosecutor concludes that Mr. Agca acted in the 1979 killing of Mr. Ipekci as part of a conspiracy headed by a Turkish underworld boss, Abuzer Ugurlu, who operated largely out of Bulgaria. The Turkish report also alleges that Mr. Ugurlu gave "financial assistance to Mr. Agca when he was in Bulgaria."

The report's significance lies mainly in that it adds the official stamp of the Turkish military prosecutor to one element of the complex case prepared by Italians investigating the attempt on the pope's life—the link between Mr. Agca and the Turkish mafia boss, Mr. Ugurlu. The Turkish findings about Mr. Agca's early activities parallel those of the Italian investigation and those of independent researchers such as Claire Sterling and Paul Henze.

Bulgarians Not Discussed

The Turkish report is a public legal document but it has received little attention outside Turkey. The report, translated by The Wall Street Journal, provides the clearest picture yet of Mr. Agca's beginnings as a paid assassin. It draws a picture of him as a tough, cynical man without fanatical political views who became an operative in an underworld ring drawn largely from his home area of Malatya in central Turkey.

The Agca of the Turkish report cheated on his university entrance exams, took sole responsibility for the 1979 killing and confidently stonewalled Turkish officials about the role of others in that murder when he

was in prison in 1979, and received money from unknown sources in a network of bank accounts opened in his name.

The Turkish report doesn't discuss Mr. Agca's alleged links with the Bulgarian secret service or the relationship, if any, of the Kremlin to the alleged conspiracy to kill the pope. A report by Italian prosecutor Antonio Albano that is expected to be issued formally this month, charges that three Bulgarian intelligence operatives in Rome met with Mr. Agca and plotted a Bulgarian-sponsored attack on the pope.

The Turkish prosecutor's report was filed in Istanbul Jan. 16 by Col. Hanefi Ongul, a senior judge of the Martial Law Prosecutor's office, and his assistant, Tefik Tunc Onat. The Turkish authorities in December 1982 had asked Col. Ongul to reinvestigate the 1979 Ipekci case, following Mr. Agca's confessions to Italian investigators about his links to Mr. Ugurlu and the Bulgarians.

The Turkish case against Mr. Ugurlu and other members of the alleged conspiracy to kill journalist Ipekci went to trial in March. Some of the report's allegations have been disclosed in testimony; the trial is continuing. According to the Turkish Embassy in Washington, Mr. Ugurlu is being held in a Turkish prison and is also a defendant in several other criminal cases besides the Ipekci murder.

Mr. Ugurlu has denied knowing Mr. Agca or participating in a conspiracy to kill Mr. Ipekci. But he has admitted to Turkish prosecutors that he gave money in 1980 to a man named Metin in Bulgaria; the prosecutor charges that "Metin" was Mr. Agca.

Mr. Ugurlu's role in the Agca case is important because of his links to the Bulgarians, who allegedly aided his drug and weapons-smuggling operations.

Relationship Summarized

A summary of this relationship is provided by Paul Henze, who closely followed Turkish affairs as an official of the high-level National Security Council during the Carter administration. Mr. Henze told a House of Representatives panel this year: "Bulgaria started early to offer protection to Turkish drug smugglers. With Bulgarian help, what came to be called the Turkish mafia set up elaborate networks, lodged in part among Turkish workers in Europe, for moving opium products westward. Fugitives from justice in their

own country, these Turkish mafia figures were permitted to buy villas in Bulgaria and were given passports and eased through Bulgarian border and customs controls."

Mr. Henze adds in an interview: "Ugurlu has been known to be involved with the Bulgarians since the 1960s. It is inconceivable that a widely known criminal operative such as Ugurlu could have lived and worked in Bulgaria without the approval of the Bulgarian intelligence service and the rest of the Bulgarian Communist Party hierarchy."

The Turkish prosecutor's report suggests that Mr. Agca was drawn into Mr. Ugurlu's network in Istanbul and was involved in petty smuggling operations. In early 1979, the report says, Mr. Ugurlu "proposed the idea of killing Abdi Ipekci," apparently to prevent the publication of stories about Mr. Ugurlu's smuggling activities.

The report quotes Turkish witnesses who say that at the time he was killed Mr. Ipekci was planning to publish an investigation of smuggling in the newspaper he edited, Milliyet.

Escape From Prison

The Turkish report also alleges that Mr. Ugurlu helped Mr. Agca escape from prison in Istanbul in November 1979, after Mr. Agca was arrested and charged with killing Mr. Ipekci, "by providing the money that was given as a bribe to the prison officials."

According to the report, Mr. Ugurlu also provided Mr. Agca with money when the prison fugitive arrived in Bulgaria in July 1980; the money was delivered by Omer Mersan, the report says. Mr. Mersan is believed to have been an associate of Mr. Ugurlu involved in European drug smuggling.

The Turkish report also outlines Mr. Agca's close involvement with Oral Celik, a Turk from Mr. Agca's home town of Malatya, who Italian investigators allege helped plan the attempted assassination of

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the pope and was present in St. Peter's Square on May 13, 1981, when Mr. Agca fired his gun.

Evidence gathered by the Turkish prosecutors indicates that Mr. Celik helped Mr. Agca plan the February 1979 killing of Mr. Ipekci, visited him in prison in Istanbul after he was arrested in June 1979, helped plan his escape in November 1979, took him by car to Ankara, the Turkish capital, after the escape, sent him to Nevsehir in central Turkey to obtain a false passport, and traveled with him in early 1980 to Erzurum, near the Iranian border in eastern Turkey, and helped him escape into Iran.

One of the Turkish report's interesting aspects is that it undercuts the picture of Mr. Agca, formed by investigators shortly after the attack on the pope, as an ideologically motivated member of the right-wing Turkish Gray Wolves organization. He did have extensive contact with members of the group, such as Mr. Celik. But the earlier view that he killed Mr. Ipekci in a right-wing plot against a liberal newspaper editor now appears to be wrong.

A Hired Gun

Instead, Mr. Agca emerges in the Turkish report as a petty criminal who evolved into a hired gun. The report claims that he forged a pass to the Istanbul University entrance exams in 1978 and had someone else take the exam for him; that he was involved in petty smuggling in Istanbul; that he robbed a jewelry store in March 1979 and a warehouse the next month; and that in February 1980 he helped murder a Turk who he believed had informed Turkish police of his role in the Ipekci killing.

Adding to this picture of Mr. Agca as a paid assassin is evidence gathered by the Turkish prosecutors about his bank accounts. The Turkish report claims that prior to the killing of Mr. Ipekci, a total of 180,000 Turkish lira, at that time about \$10,000, was deposited in his name in four Istanbul bank accounts. Mr. Agca claimed to Turkish investigators that he obtained the money through smuggling.

The Italian investigation of Mr. Agca continues the story from the point the Turkish report leaves off, after Mr. Agca's flight to Bulgaria. The two reports, taken together, suggest that after becoming a paid gunman for the Bulgarian-based Turkish mafia, and after threatening on his own to kill the pope in November 1979, Mr. Agca was taken up by operatives of the Bulgarian intelligence service.

Neither report sheds light on speculation that the Soviet Union may have cooperated with Bulgarian intelligence services in the papal shooting. Given the difficulty of obtaining evidence about Soviet intelligence operations, that question may never be settled. But the investigations of Mr. Agca have sharply altered the early picture of him as simply a deranged, right-wing assassin acting on his own.